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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report assesses the steps taken in 2015 to achieve a world fit for children, highlighting the gaps in achievement as well as the strategic shifts necessary to achieve the unmet goals.

The report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution S-27/2, adopted at the twenty-seventh special session in 2002, and resolutions 58/282 and 61/272, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report regularly on progress made in implementing the Plan of Action included in the annex to the resolution entitled "A world fit for children".

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I. Introduction

1. At the special session of the General Assembly on children, held in in 2002, delegations from 190 countries adopted the document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), containing a Declaration and Plan of Action. In the resolution, Member States made a commitment to a time-bound set of goals for children and young people, with a particular focus on promoting healthy lives; providing quality education; protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV and AIDS. The present report provides the fourteenth update on progress made in follow-up to the special session.

2. In its resolution 65/1, Member States made a further commitment to accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Subsequently, during the high-level meeting held in 2014 to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Member States, United Nations agencies and their partners made a commitment to work together to ensure that every child is given a fair chance in life.

3. Significant and wide-ranging global accords affecting children were reached in 2015 on sustainable development (the Sustainable Development Goals); disaster risk reduction (the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030); climate change (the Paris Agreement); and financing for development (the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development). Furthermore, in 2016, the agreements on humanitarian issues achieved at the World Humanitarian Summit, held in May 2016, and those on urbanization expected to result from the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in October 2016, will also contribute substantially to realizing the rights of the world's 2.3 billion children and increase the possibility of a fair chance in life for the most disadvantaged.

4. A child's chance to survive and thrive was much greater in 2015 than it was when the global community committed to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. This was clearly recognized at the special focus session on equity of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), held in June 2015. There is clear evidence of significant progress made between 2000 and 2015 in child survival, nutrition and primary school enrolment and in reduction in mother-to-child transmission of HIV, among other areas. The absolute number of children dying before their fifth birthday has fallen by more than half, from 12.7 million in 1990 to about 5.9 million in 2015. The percentage of underweight children under 5 years of age has declined from 25 per cent to 14 per cent over roughly the same period. However, stunting, now understood as a key marker of child undernutrition, still affects nearly a quarter of all children worldwide. Maternal mortality, though still stubbornly high, has decreased dramatically, from 532,000 deaths in 1990 to 303,000 in 2015. Over 6.2 million deaths from malaria were averted between 2000 and 2015, primarily among children under 5 years of age in sub-Saharan Africa. The number of out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide has fallen by almost half in 15 years, from 105 million in 1999 to an estimated 59 million in 2013. In 2015, 91 per cent of the global population used an improved drinking water source, compared with 76 per cent in 1990.

5. However, persistent and, in many cases, growing inequalities continue, depriving the poorest and most excluded children of services to which they are

entitled. In 2015, 2.4 billion people worldwide still lacked access to improved sanitation facilities and 946 million continued to practise open defecation. An estimated 36.9 million people were living with HIV in 2014, approximately 2.6 million of whom were children younger than 15 years of age. As documented in the previous report (A/70/265), data show that, although the proportion of adolescents with comprehensive and accurate knowledge about HIV has increased globally, 83 per cent of girls among the poorest wealth quintiles in sub-Saharan Africa still lack this information. Regarding child marriage, between approximately 1990 and 2010, there was a moderate reduction in the incidence of this practice, but the gap in global levels of child marriage between girls from the wealthiest and the poorest quintiles increased dramatically.

6. The scale and complexity of humanitarian crises continued to increase in 2015, with UNICEF and partners responding to 310 humanitarian situations of varying scales in 102 countries. Protracted conflicts affected a growing number of children and families while humanitarian situations increasingly spilled over borders into subregional displacement crises. In 2015, children made up one quarter of the 1 million refugees and migrants entering Europe from the Syrian Arab Republic and conflict zones in the Middle East and beyond. Climate change continues to pose a serious threat to children, with more than half a billion children living in areas at extremely high risk of flood and nearly 160 million in zones with high or extremely high risk of drought.

7. Protracted conflicts affected millions of children, including in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Refugee and displacement crises, such as those in Burundi, Nigeria and the Middle East, exposed a growing number of children to severe food shortages, disease and abuse. In Europe, thousands of children on the move faced a number of challenges, including heightened protection risks. In Nepal, two devastating earthquakes struck, affecting the lives of more than a million children. In the Pacific Islands, climate change exacerbated the impacts of natural hazards, which quickly exceeded local coping capacities. The Ebola outbreak, which began in 2014 and continued into 2015, took a dramatic toll on Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, affecting livelihoods, disrupting public services and threatening the progress achieved in recent years.

8. United Nations entities focused humanitarian action on saving lives, protecting children and addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability to crises. In 2015, these organizations continued to leverage the comparative advantage for humanitarian action of several successful strategies: having a field presence before, during and after emergencies; taking a multisectoral approach; leveraging the potential of a vast network of partners, including government, civil society and the private sector; and engaging in dedicated inter-agency collaboration with partners in the humanitarian system.

9. These strategies enabled the United Nations entities to support results for millions of children in a variety of contexts in 2015. Globally, nearly 25.5 million people accessed a sufficient quantity of water of appropriate quality for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene. Nearly 2 million children from 6 to 59 months of age with severe acute malnutrition benefited from therapeutic feeding programmes and 23 million children from 6 months to 15 years of age received measles vaccinations. More than 3.1 million children accessed psychosocial support and 7.5 million

school-age children were reached with formal and non-formal basic education. Some 16,600 women living with HIV continued antiretroviral therapy.

II. Follow-up to the General Assembly special session on children

A. Planning for children

10. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, Member States set forth an ambitious global plan of action that aims to eliminate extreme poverty and hunger, provide quality lifelong education for all, protect the planet and promote peaceful and inclusive societies. Although many of the 17 goals and 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals refer directly to children, all of the Goals are relevant to children's lives and, taken together, amount to a holistic approach to meeting children's needs, protecting them from harm, securing their environments and realizing their rights.

11. The Sustainable Development Goals build on commitments to children in the areas of poverty reduction, nutrition, health, education, water and sanitation and gender equality contained in the Millennium Development Goals. Crucially, the Sustainable Development Goals also include new commitments on, for example, child protection, early childhood education and reducing inequalities. Furthermore, the Goals reflect the recognition that meaningful, genuine and lasting engagement of children and young people is imperative for attaining sustainable results and galvanizing children as positive agents of change in their families and communities.

12. Member States are at various stages of adapting the global Goals to their respective domestic contexts. In many countries, the process entailed formal national launches, the establishment of steering committees for implementation and the development of road maps or action plans to facilitate the mainstreaming of the Goals into national and local development plans, strategies and priorities.

13. As Member States operationalize the 2030 Agenda, it is critical that the rights and well-being of children — in particular of the poorest and most vulnerable — remain at the centre of global, regional and subnational development plans, resource allocations and monitoring frameworks. "A world fit for children" guided reporting on children during the Millennium Development Goals era. Maintaining a continued focus on children in policymaking and budgeting for sustainable development remains essential for the Sustainable Development Goals era and beyond.

B. Promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

14. In 2015, two long-awaited ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — by Somalia and South Sudan — took place, bringing the total number of States parties to 196. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict had been ratified by 163 States as of May 2016. The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography has been ratified by 173 States, while 27 States have ratified the third Optional Protocol to the Convention, on a communications procedure.

15. In 2015, the Committee on the Rights of the Child advanced its work on three general comments under discussion: on the rights of children in adolescence, on public spending to realize children's rights and on the rights of children in street situations. The Committee took the decision to collaborate with the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families on a joint general comment on the rights of children in situations of migration. The first two general comments are expected to be adopted in 2016. Preparation of the general comment on public spending was complemented by the annual day of discussion on child rights in the Human Rights Council, which in 2015 focused on better investment in the rights of the child.

C. Collaborating with partners and leveraging resources for children

16. A decline in aid flows during the last years of the twentieth century was reversed early in the current millennium, with aid growing to an all-time high in 2013. The value of total official development assistance has increased by 83 per cent in real terms since 2000. However, assistance to the poorest countries continued to fall, and was down 8 per cent in 2014 relative to 2013, when discounting for debt relief. Members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development provided a total of $131.6 billion in 2015, which represented an increase of 6.9 per cent in real terms since 2014. Net official development assistance represented 0.3 per cent of the gross national income of Committee members in 2015, on a par with 2014.

17. A number of recent partnerships and initiatives have advanced child rights. These include the Global Financing Facility in support of Every Woman, Every Child; the new UNITLIFE fund for fighting child malnutrition in Africa; the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children; and a new alliance with the World Bank Group around early childhood development that aims to make investments in the early years a global priority. The existing Global Programme Partnerships, including the Global Partnership for Education, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, have focused on, among other areas, the development of new operational models and strategic frameworks, many of which are shifting to a closer alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF alone is currently engaged in 71 such global partnerships, with a governance role in 48 of them. Efforts to implement the Goals and current discussions around the humanitarian-development nexus have given impetus to the creation of new partnerships and associated funds, including for education in emergencies. A new Concessional Financing Facility has been created to deal with the human costs of the Syrian refugee crisis in middle-income countries such as Jordan and Lebanon.

D. Monitoring progress

18. When Heads of State assembled for the World Summit for Children in 1990, they had very limited information upon which to base targets to promote the survival, protection and development of children. Since then, there has been a revolution in the collection and use of robust, high-quality data on the situation of children around the world.

19. Much of the recent progress on data for children has been spurred by the rapid expansion and innovation of international household surveys, such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. In the 21 years between the survey's inception in 1995 and 2016 over 300 such surveys have been undertaken in more than 100 countries, collecting data on a range of topics covering the situation of children and women. Data from the fifth round of these surveys, which commenced in 2013 and covered 42 countries, were used in the final assessment of the Millennium Development Goals and also formed the baselines for many of the Sustainable Developments Goals and targets. The sixth round will commence in the last quarter of 2016 and is expected to cover most of the Sustainable Development Goals indicators that require data collection through household sample surveys.

20. Systems for collecting real-time information and interaction have been scaled up dramatically in the last year. U-Report, the social media platform, now has more than 2.1 million active users in 20 countries. It was used during the Ebola response to obtain real-time information via Short Message Service (SMS), and is in continuous use by Governments and partners to create real-time information flows with young people. Open-source systems like T-Watoto in the United Republic of Tanzania and the Mobile Vital Records System (MobileVRS) in Uganda have dramatically raised rates of birth registration. For example, in Uganda, the rate rose from 37 per cent in 2013 to 60 per cent by the end of 2014.

21. As reported in 2015, the Monitoring Results for Equity System provides evidence for focused efforts on the most disadvantaged children. Evidence-gathering is receiving additional support from the guidance on frequent monitoring produced jointly in 2014 by United Nations agencies. A webinar featuring a panel of technical experts from UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme on real-time monitoring was organized in 2015 under the "innovations" umbrella of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. This webinar targeted United Nations country teams designing their Frameworks, reaching teams in 25 countries.

E. Participation and self-expression of children

22. Strengthening the participation of children in discussions and decisions relevant to their lives is an important component of the 2030 Agenda, with its emphasis on children as agents of change. Such efforts include promoting the meaningful and inclusive participation of children in programme and policy planning and implementation, and the monitoring of processes and results at school and at the community, subnational and national levels. In 2015, there was a 10 percentage-point increase in the number of countries having a functional mechanism at the local, subnational or national level for the participation of children in influencing development agendas and plans to benefit the most disadvantaged and marginalized.

23. Participation initiatives have taken various forms, such as establishing mechanisms through which children can engage directly with decision makers, or supporting children and adolescents to conduct research and advocacy to promote child rights. In Brazil, for example, adolescent citizenship groups were established to influence public policy relating to child rights, and 22,000 adolescents across 800 municipalities participated in the development of municipal action plans in line with local needs and priorities. In Indonesia and Nepal, media networks and

community radios provided space for young people to discuss the conditions of schools and social services. In Jordan, adolescents participated in local governance, influencing local government plans and contributing to holding local governments accountable for delivering services for children and adolescents.

24. Communication for development initiatives also demonstrated positive results by mobilizing adolescent networks using innovative approaches and platforms. For example, the UNICEF-supported Peace Messenger Clubs engaged 5,000 children who were associated with armed forces or groups in conflict-management training and participatory video and theatre, which strengthened their capacity as agents of peace. An evaluation of this initiative revealed that it had a significant impact on adolescents, who reported improved motivation (28 per cent), commitment to being a role model in daily life (20 per cent), active promotion of peace in the wider community (18 per cent), meaningful engagement in the Peace Club (16 per cent), increased tolerance (10 per cent), acceptance of others (10 per cent), increased inner peace (10 per cent), increased awareness (8 per cent) and better behaviour in school (8 per cent).

25. In Uganda, interventions included radio programmes, listenership groups and youth engagement in community dialogue and participatory theatre to address youth unemployment, marginalization and grievances relating to young people's roles in families and communities. Participating adolescents reported that they became more involved in constructive peer groups, community action, peer learning and collaboration with community leaders on issues relating to youth. Communication for development strategies to improve child participation include efforts to reduce discrimination against and the marginalization of groups of children. The positive impact of such efforts are illustrated in Montenegro, where a survey showed a marked increase in the percentage of the population accepting that a child with a disability should be able to attend the same class as their child (from 35 per cent in 2010 to 76 per cent in 2015).

26. In partnership with the private sector, an initiative was launched that focuses on empowering adolescents through skills-building and civic engagement. The initiative, undertaken in Indonesia, Montenegro, the Philippines, Zambia and Kosovo (under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)), involved children in discussing issues critical to them, such as conflict, tolerance, disaster risk reduction, identity and diversity.

III. Progress in the four major goal areas

A. Promoting healthy lives

27. As reported in 2015, the under-five mortality rate and the absolute number of under-five deaths per year have fallen by more than half since 1990. This means that an average of 19,000 young lives have been saved every day. The average annual rate of reduction in under-five mortality more than doubled from the 1990s, when it was 1.8 per cent, to 3.9 per cent during the period 2000-2015. This accelerated progress has saved the lives of almost 100 million children below age 5 over the past two decades, including 24 million newborns.

28. Yet this achievement was not sufficient to meet the Millennium Development Goal target of a two-thirds reduction in under-five mortality between 1990 and 2015. During this period, 236 million children worldwide died before their fifth birthday. Sub-Saharan Africa continued to shoulder the greatest burden: in that region, 1 in 11 children still dies before age 5, nearly 15 times the average in high-income countries. Millions of children still lack access to quality care, immunizations and affordable life-saving commodities, such as antibiotics, oral rehydration salts and drugs to treat malaria. In 2013, pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria accounted for about one third of all under-five deaths. Pneumonia alone was responsible for 13 per cent of all fatalities.

29. More innovative approaches are being scaled up to reach the poorest and most marginalized children with health interventions. For instance, more than two thirds of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa are now implementing integrated community case management for malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea. Those programmes have proven to help save children's lives. However, one important intervention that is failing to reach many poor and marginalized children is birth registration. The coordination of health services with birth registration and data management systems remains inadequate in many countries, and will now require a more concerted effort and investment.

30. Neonatal deaths account for 44 per cent of all deaths of children under age 5. In 2015, just over half (52 per cent) of births in least developed countries took place with the help of a skilled health-care provider, up from 32 per cent in 2000. The global rate of women delivering with skilled attendance saw only a modest increase, from 57 per cent in 1990 to 71 per cent in 2015. The services of a skilled professional are crucial to reducing maternal and neonatal deaths. Skilled attendance at birth also provides immediate care to newborns and ensures that breastfeeding begins within minutes of birth. Evidence confirms that high-quality care around the time of birth, along with better care of small and sick babies, is the best approach for saving the lives of mothers and newborns and preventing stillbirths.

31. Countries can have such services in place by ensuring that the national health-sector plan prioritizes evidence-based interventions. Under the leadership of UNICEF and the World Health Organization, and with the support of partners, momentum was gained in the implementation of Every Newborn action plans to accelerate progress in newborn survival, with 16 out of 24 priority countries having finalized plans by the end of 2015.

32. A key part of saving lives is timely immunization. By the end of 2015, 123 countries had reached at least 90 per cent national coverage for measles and 130 countries for diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis immunization for children under 1 year of age. Among 59 target countries, 38 had eliminated maternal and neonatal tetanus as of the end of 2015. An additional 14 million women of reproductive age received tetanus vaccinations in seven countries. Fifteen countries have strengthened national immunization supply chain systems through the effective vaccine management approach.

33. Eradication of polio remains a global priority. By the end of 2015, 74 countries had introduced the inactivated polio vaccine into their routine immunization systems. The world is on track to achieve certified polio-free status for all countries by 2019, with the lowest-ever number of wild polio virus cases recorded. Nigeria

was declared polio-free in 2015, leaving only two endemic countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, with their lowest-ever recorded numbers of polio cases.

34. Under the banner of the initiative A Promise Renewed, launched in 2012, 55 countries conducted annual reviews in 2015. Actions included sharpening national health strategies, announcing costed targets and mobilizing civil society around the initiative's goals. The number of countries with national scorecards to monitor progress and strengthen strategies to improve the health and well-being of women, newborns, children and adolescents increased from 44 in 2014 to 46 in 2015.

35. Global health partnerships, including the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, the Diarrhoea and Pneumonia Working Group, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership and Every Mother, Every Newborn, continue to drive policy change and action. In 2015, 64 of 75 priority countries for Countdown to 2015 had costed implementation plans for maternal, newborn and child health care, up from 52 in 2014. By the end of 2015, 51 countries had developed, budgeted and implemented a maternal, newborn and child health communications plan, up from 43 the year before.

36. Well-nourished children are healthier, more resistant to disease and more likely to survive. As they grow, they are more able to learn, becoming more productive and well equipped to participate in and contribute to the life of their communities. Yet, malnutrition in all its forms remains a persistent challenge. The estimated number of stunted children globally has declined from the 2010 baseline of 169 million to 159 million children in 2014. In 2014, just over half of all stunted children lived in Asia and over one third in Africa, where the number of stunted children is increasing.

37. While often associated with emergencies, the burden of wasting (acute malnutrition) remains high in many stable contexts. In 2014, an estimated 50 million children under age 5 suffered from wasting and 16 million from severe wasting. An estimated 68 per cent of all children experiencing wasting lived in Asia and almost 30 per cent in Africa. At the other end of the spectrum, 41 million children under age 5 were overweight in 2014, up from 31 million in 1990.

38. Globally, millions of children continue to suffer from micronutrient deficiencies and, consequently, poor growth, delayed cognitive development, weakened immunity, disability and disease, and even death. An estimated 29 per cent of children 6 to 59 months of age suffer from vitamin A deficiency in low- and middle-income settings. Furthermore, 43 per cent of preschool-age children and 29 per cent of women of reproductive age suffer from anaemia, often due to iron deficiency.

39. Improving nutrition is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and nutrition has been included in the indicator framework. In order to address the multiple nutrition challenges, which tend to affect the most disadvantaged, the global nutrition community continues to strive to create a more enabling environment for the scale-up of nutrition programmes. At the end of 2015, 56 countries had joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, compared with 48 at the start of the 2014. SUN supports multisectoral and coordinated actions to scale up evidence-based, costed nutrition plans.

40. The importance of breastfeeding was reconfirmed by new evidence that estimates that the lives of more than 800,000 children and 20,000 mothers can be saved every year by improving breastfeeding rates. Breastfeeding also contributes

crucially to brain development and the prevention of overweight and obesity. Yet only 39 per cent of infants under six months of age are breastfed exclusively.

41. Iodine deficiency is a common cause of preventable cognitive impairment. The introduction of adequately iodized salt into food chains has led to remarkable decreases in iodine deficiency worldwide. Currently, three quarters of households globally consume adequately iodized salt.

42. For women of childbearing age, fortifying commonly consumed cereal grains such as wheat flour, maize flour and rice is an important means to prevent birth defects and anaemia. Currently, 85 countries have legislation mandating fortification of at least one industrially milled cereal grain. For young children, home fortification using micronutrient powders is a more targeted approach currently operating in at least 50 countries worldwide. It is also a promising tool to address anaemia and improve diet quality.

43. In 2015, over 3 million children with severe acute malnutrition accessed treatment services in over 75 countries. While the number of children accessing treatment continues to increase, further work is required to scale up treatment services globally, alongside continued investments to prevent malnutrition through multisectoral, risk-informed programming.

44. In least developed countries, only 46 per cent of children receive complementary foods with adequate frequency. Only 20 per cent meet the criteria for the minimum dietary diversity and 11 per cent have a minimum acceptable diet. Only one third of the wealthiest in least developed countries are meeting the minimum requirement for dietary diversity among children aged from 6 to 23 months. Some 11.3 million children and pregnant and lactating women were supported with specific nutrition interventions in 2015.

45. In 2015, 17 million children in 64 countries were reached with school meals. School meals continued to be the primary safety net implemented in coordination with national Governments. School meals programmes have multiple benefits, including promoting and protecting access to education, specifically for girls, when combined with take-home rations. Furthermore, it has a nutrition objective by providing the appropriate micronutrients to children to support their learning capacity and cognitive development. A gathering of school meals practitioner networks of 23 African countries was held in 2015 to support knowledge exchange, research and study visits.

46. In order to better harmonize the work of the United Nations in nutrition and ensure that the United Nations system is "fit for purpose", the United Nations Global Nutrition Agenda was launched in 2015. This complements other activities, including the work of the United Nations Network for SUN and the Standing Committee on Nutrition.

47. Since 1990, 2.6 billion people have gained access to an improved drinking-water source and 2.1 billion have gained access to an improved sanitation facility through the collective efforts of stakeholders. Yet there were almost as many people without access to improved sanitation in 2015 (2,370,000,000) as in 1990 (2,450,000,000). Adequate sanitation coverage remains below 50 per cent in 47 countries. While the proportion of people practising open defecation fell from 24 per cent to 13 per cent during that period, it stills represents 946 million people.

The majority of those without sanitation access live in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

48. The Millennium Development Goals drinking-water target of halving the proportion of people without access was met globally, as well as nationally in 147 countries. However, least developed countries did not meet the target as a group, and neither did sub-Saharan Africa. In 2015, a total of 663 million people lacked access to an improved drinking-water source. Yet from 2000 to 2015, the importance of encouraging improved hygiene behaviours became entrenched in sector plans and gains were made in the proportion of people washing their hands with soap. Ensuring the safety of water supplies remained a challenge, with sustainability a major issue, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Across the board, there continue to be low coverage rates of adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in health-care facilities and schools.

49. Sustainable Development Goal 6 covers the whole water cycle and includes targets for universal access to drinking water as well as for sanitation and hygiene that are significantly more ambitious than those in the Millennium Development Goals. Extending basic services to populations that remain unserved and increasing the quality of existing services in line with global norms and standards for accessibility, availability, quality and affordability will require a dramatic change in rates of progress and a threefold increase in current levels of investment. It will also require developing new approaches that will work in urban areas and new partnerships with the private sector to leverage available resources for children. Discussions on financing for development suggest that while some low-income and fragile States remain dependent on external support, most of the additional financing is expected to come from domestic resources, including private-sector investments for WASH.

50. In 2014, early childhood development became a concrete part of the global development agenda. One of the biggest achievements globally in relation to early learning in 2015 was the successful advocacy for early childhood development and early learning/school readiness as a specific target with indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2015, 45 per cent of countries had suitable early learning curricula, safe and protective early learning centres and active parental and community engagement with early learning programmes, compared with 31 per cent in 2013. The percentage of countries in which early childhood care and education facilities were safe and supportive increased from 28 per cent in 2014 to 40 per cent in 2015.

51. In Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, support to Governments has been particularly effective, as the percentage of countries with effective early learning policies and quality early learning programmes increased from 50 per cent in 2013 to 86 per cent in 2015. There has also been significant progress in regions starting from a very low baseline. For example, in South Asia, 38 per cent of countries reported having effective early learning policies and quality early learning programmes in 2015, compared with only 14 per cent in 2013.

B. Providing quality education

52. In 2015, a transformative and expansive vision for education was adopted with the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 4, on education, covers all levels, from pre-primary education to tertiary education to global citizenship, with equity and learning outcomes as central themes at all levels. The Goals represent a shift away from emphasizing access towards encompassing equity in access and quality of education and learning. This shift was precipitated by the reality that, for far too many children, quality education was unattainable.

53. Since 2000, significant progress has been made in education across all countries, especially in many low- and lower-middle-income countries. The number of children and adolescents who were out of school has fallen by almost half since 2000, with 34 million more children estimated to have attended school. Net enrolment ratios rose by at least 20 per cent from 1999 to 2012 in 17 countries, 11 of which were in sub-Saharan Africa.

54. Yet the world did not achieve the Millennium Development Goal target of universal primary education, and 59 million children (1 in 11) of primary school age are still out of school. Of these, 30 million live in sub-Saharan Africa and 10 million in South and West Asia. Including young adolescents, an estimated 124 million children have never started school or have dropped out. Inequalities in education have increased, with the heaviest burden shouldered by children who are disadvantaged by poverty, gender, conflict, ethnicity, child labour and disability. The world's poorest children are four times more likely to be out of school than the richest children.

55. Quality pre-primary education remains a key strategy to building the strong foundations children need in order to enter school at the right age, stay in school and thrive in learning. Today, an estimated 184 million children are enrolled in pre-primary education, an increase of nearly two thirds since 1999. Still, there is much progress to be made in expanding access to reach all children, with only one in five children in developing countries participating in pre-primary education. Children living in the poorest households are particularly disadvantaged, with up to 10 times less likelihood of attending some form of early childhood care and education than those in the richest households. Obstacles that continue to impede the implementation and scale-up of quality programmes include limited government investments in preschool education, low capacity and social demand for pre-primary education and lack of evidence-based alternative models for early learning.

56. Since 1999, the number of countries with fewer than 90 girls enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys decreased from 33 to 16. Yet gender disparity in primary education persists in almost one third of countries. Estimates show that twice as many girls as boys are expected never to enrol in school. In sub-Saharan Africa, 16.7 million girls are out of school, 9.3 million of whom will never enter a classroom. In South and West Asia, 80 per cent of out-of-school girls are unlikely to start school, compared with just 16 per cent of boys. Girls who live in conflict-affected countries are more than twice as likely to be out of school as their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict.

57. Globally, enrolment rates for lower-secondary schools increased from 71 per cent in 1999 to 85 per cent in 2012, with the greatest progress taking place in the region of East Asia and the Pacific. However, inequalities in transitioning from

primary to secondary school persist. Progress in closing the gender gap has been even slower in secondary education, with only about 48 per cent of countries expected to reach gender parity by 2015. Poverty and location often combine with gender to create deep inequalities within countries. If current trends continue, lower-secondary school completion in sub-Saharan Africa will not be achieved until 2111 for the poorest girls, compared with 2051 for the richest girls and 2090 for the poorest boys. In sub-Saharan Africa, while 75 per cent of girls enter primary school, only 8 per cent progress to and complete secondary school.

58. While the available data regarding children with disabilities are incomplete and of poor quality, there is evidence that these children make up one of the most marginalized groups and are commonly excluded from education opportunities. According to household surveys, about half of children with disabilities, on average, and up to 90 per cent in some countries in the developing world, do not go to school.

59. Ensuring quality education and learning for all remains one of the most critical elements of the development agenda today. An estimated 250 million children either do not make it to grade 4 or reach grade 4 without acquiring basic skills in reading, writing and math. These numbers show that significant growth in enrolment since 2000 has not been matched by quality and learning outcomes. Children from disadvantaged regions of poor countries are lagging behind even further. In these countries, the estimated percentage of children who cannot read at all, even after several years of schooling, ranges between 25 and 75 per cent. In East African countries, the learning level of children from poorer households is at least one year behind that of children from richer households.

60. Improving learning outcomes requires a concerted effort that fosters strong systems and quality learning environments through evidence-based policies and standards, backed by adequate resources. By 2015, evidence (from UNICEF-assisted countries) showed that 51 per cent of countries — an increase from 42 per cent in 2013 — had well-functioning student learning assessment systems, especially for the early grades.

61. Teachers have a big impact on children's learning, but in many countries, there is a continuing shortage of well-trained, motivated and supported teachers. According to recent estimates, 25.8 million teachers are needed across the world in order to provide every child with primary education by 2030. In one third of all countries, fewer than 75 per cent of teachers have been trained according to national standards and in low-income countries, teachers manage, on average, a classroom of 43 students.

62. The diversity of factors that impede access to quality learning opportunities for disadvantaged children means that education systems need to be innovative and responsive to the needs of all children. In many countries in which the language of instruction does not match the language spoken at home, ethnicity effectively acts as one of the major barriers to education. Efforts to overcome barriers to education in Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and the Pacific have shown a positive impact in learning outcomes, contributing to the growing evidence base demonstrating the effectiveness of these approaches. For young adolescents, life skills education and social emotional learning programmes have been critical in strengthening the well-being, physical health, participation and safety of girls and boys, particularly those from the most vulnerable communities.

63. A wide range of efforts is needed to improve the education outcomes for girls, including gender-sensitive strategies in education-sector plans, improvement in primary school retention and support for the transition from primary to secondary schools. Ensuring a safe, protective environment is also critical. Gender-based violence in and around schools is a significant barrier to education, especially for girls, adversely affecting their education experiences. Working with partners, United Nations agencies are supporting mechanisms to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in schools, as well as violence against children more broadly.

64. In 2015, conflicts, natural disasters and other crises affected 462 million children and youth in 35 countries, 75 million of whom had their education disrupted. It is estimated that by 2018, half the world's poor and the majority of its out-of-school children will live in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Concerns relating to the increase in attacks on schools and children have also grown in recent years.

65. Yet education receives less than 2 per cent of humanitarian aid, which often comes too late and is insufficient to respond to the challenges presented. Given an estimated financing gap of $8.5 billion a year, the global education community launched Education Cannot Wait: A Fund for Education in Emergencies at the World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in May 2016. The fund is expected to play an instrumental role in delivering education in more effective ways, through better-coordinated responses to addressing the range of political, financial and operational challenges.

66. Insufficient financing for education, in terms of both domestic and external resources, remains a major obstacle to ensuring equitable and quality education for all children. While education relies primarily on domestic resources, the amount of resources devoted to education as a share of gross national product, on average, was only 4 per cent in low-income countries. Since 1999, the share of government expenditure on education has changed little, with a world average of 13.7 per cent. The repercussions of the global economic crisis and the lack of priority given to education by external donors have also resulted in a decrease of resources by 10 per cent since 2009, leaving an estimated funding gap of $39 billion a year. Given the diminishing resources, non-traditional financing for development has grown in importance, but more work is needed to apply it in the education sector.

67. More critical is the need for improved equity in the distribution of resources, so that the poor and disadvantaged children who would benefit most from education funding receive the greatest public support. In most countries, the opposite is true, with the wealthiest quintile of children receiving about 5-10 times more education resources — textbooks and teachers, for example — than the poorest quintile. In low-income countries, on average, 46 per cent of public education resources are allocated to educate the 10 per cent of students who are most educated; in lower-middle-income countries, the figure is 26 per cent and in upper-middle-income and high-income countries, it is 13 per cent.

C. Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence

68. Considerable progress has been made in the area of child protection. In 2015, the births of more than 9.7 million children were registered in 54 countries, and 123 countries reported registration systems that are free, universal and continuous. Interventions on preventing armed violence reached more than 3.6 million children

and adolescents from 10 to 24 years old, compared with 2.2 million in 2014. More than 5.6 million children at risk were prevented from engaging in and/or were withdrawn from child labour through one or more education, social protection or child protection interventions in 30 countries; this represents a 24 per cent increase over 2014, when 4.5 million children were reached. More than 2,000 communities across 14 countries, covering 5 million people, declared the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting in 2015, compared with 1,000 communities across 9 countries in 2014. In terms of alternative care reform, such as deinstitutionalization, 61 countries reported having a policy in line with the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, three more than in 2014.

69. In 2015, 30 countries strengthened national plans or strategies to end child marriage, with 9 countries developing costed action plans (compared with 18 and 5, respectively, in 2014). The completion of the inception phase of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage programme has the potential to reach directly, by the end of 2019, 2.5 million girls in 12 target countries who are at risk of child marriage or already in union. A partnership with the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance is continuing joint efforts to strengthen the social sector workforce as part of broader national child protection systems development.

70. In the area of online violence, the #WeProtect initiative was established to build the capacity of government, civil society and private-sector actors to tackle online sexual exploitation, spanning 17 core countries across six regions. As a result of global and national advocacy, in 2015 corporal punishment of children was prohibited in schools in 127 countries (122 in 2014).

71. Support to child protection systems development was provided in 122 countries through the development or implementation of legislation, policies and standards, alongside strengthening direct service provision. Increasingly, the focus is on building cross-sectoral linkages with health, education and social protection. At least 40 countries reported strengthened child protection systems in 2015 and at least 35 countries reported having child protection legislation consistent with or better than international standards.

72. During 2015, psychosocial interventions aided about 3.1 million girls and boys in 68 countries, including through the provision of child-friendly spaces and community- and school-based interventions. Almost 2 million girls, boys and women in 39 countries received elements of an expanded package of risk mitigation, prevention and response interventions around gender-based violence in emergencies. More than 2.8 million girls and boys in 15 countries received mine risk education. About 32,000 unaccompanied or separated children received appropriate alternative care services and at least 25 per cent of children in 30 crisis-affected countries were reunited with families and caregivers. Almost 10,000 children were released from armed forces or armed groups, with at least 70 per cent receiving reintegration assistance.

73. Concerning the massive population movements to Europe, with a large influx of child refugees (including unaccompanied and separated children) arriving from the Middle East and North Africa, child-friendly spaces were established in six reception facilities and transit locations, where, by the end of 2015, 81,000 children had benefited from emotional, stress management and psychosocial support, family reunification services, as well as recreational and basic education activities. A total

of 57,515 children at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse were reached through the provision of safe spaces and messaging about risks associated with trafficking in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia.

74. A significant breakthrough in combating the worrisome rise in reported abductions of children in fragile States and humanitarian situations came with the adoption of Security Council resolution 2225 (2015), which will hold to greater accountability parties to armed conflict that engage in patterns of abduction of children. UNICEF continues to support the ongoing implementation of action plans to prevent and end grave violations against children in armed conflict, with all seven remaining Governments concerned by the Children, Not Solders campaign having signed action plans.

D. Combating HIV and AIDS

75. Strategic investments in the response to HIV and AIDS continue to generate concrete results, fuelling optimism about ending the epidemic by 2030. A total of 36.9 million people worldwide are living with HIV, 2.6 million of whom are children under the age of 15. The number of new HIV infections is 35 per cent lower than in 2000 and the number of AIDS-related deaths has fallen by 42 per cent since the peak in 2004.

76. Twenty-one out of 22 priority countries for the Global Plan Towards the Elimination of New HIV Infections among Children by 2015 and Keeping Their Mothers Alive: 2011-2015 were implementing task-shifting to non-physician health-care providers of antiretroviral therapy, and in 11 out of 22 Global Plan priority countries, at least 80 per cent of antenatal care settings in targeted areas offered this therapy. In humanitarian situations, 59 per cent of targeted pregnant women living with HIV were receiving continuing treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, an increase from 54 per cent in 2014. To promote gender equality, 13 out of 38 priority Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) countries were supported to undertake a gender review of their HIV policy.

77. An important area of progress has been the increase in the proportion of pregnant women living with HIV who receive antiretroviral medicines to prevent mother-to-child transmission. The most effective antiretroviral treatment now reaches 73 per cent of pregnant women living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries and has prevented 1.3 million new infections among children since 2000.

78. Despite the continuing progress in combating HIV and AIDS, disparities and inequities persist for children under age 5, pregnant women, mothers and adolescents. At the end of 2015, only 31 per cent of infected children worldwide were receiving antiretroviral therapy compared with 42 per cent of infected adults. AIDS is now the leading cause of death among adolescents in Africa.

79. AIDS mortality and rising rates of HIV infection among adolescents are of significant concern. The key populations most at risk of HIV infection are girls, gay and bisexual adolescent boys, transgender adolescents, adolescents who inject drugs and children from 10 to 17 years of age who are exploited through the selling of sex. Many are never diagnosed because they fear legal and social repercussions if they seek information, enter prevention programmes or get tested. In 2015, UNICEF and UNAIDS launched the initiative All In to #EndAdolescentAIDS in Nairobi,

with the President of Kenya. This initiative aims to reduce new HIV infections among adolescents by 75 per cent, reduce adolescent AIDS deaths by 65 per cent and eliminate stigma and discrimination by 2020.

80. Addressing the needs of key adolescent populations continues to be a critical challenge and goal. Efforts to achieve sustained adolescent engagement and comprehensive knowledge and behaviour change need to be intensified.

IV. Ways forward

81. Responding effectively to the 2030 Agenda will require important shifts in what Governments and partners do and how they work. It will be necessary to pursue strategic partnerships across the United Nations system, the private sector and civil society to respond in an integrated way to other challenges to child well-being highlighted by the Agenda, including climate change, urbanization, displacement, the demographic transition and growing challenges in the second decade of life.

82. The multiple challenges faced by children demand innovative responses by many partners, including civil society and the private sector. Deepening engagement with the public in all country contexts will help to mobilize a diverse range of actors, in particular communities and movements, focused on serving the most disadvantaged children everywhere and helping to strengthen the accountability of Governments and United Nations partners for improved results for children.

83. The fifteenth anniversary of "A world fit for children" in 2017, following the adoption in 2015 of the Sustainable Development Goals and other major global agreements, will present an opportunity to review ways in which the post-2015 development agenda can pay particular attention to reducing inequality among children. The momentum achieved by the global agreements presents an opportunity to advance child well-being that cannot and must not be missed. Nothing less will do to achieve the powerful vision of "A world fit for children".

84. Despite the uncertain outlook, the potential for transformative change has never been greater. The world has a new commitment and the knowledge and means to overcome many of the critical obstacles that prevent children from realizing their potential and their rights. Without ambitious action on sustainable development, humanitarian assistance and climate change, the promise of progress brought about by new agreements risks becoming a tragedy for the world's youngest citizens. And without reaching the most disadvantaged children, the world will not be able to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.